# Translating the Genre of Quran: the Challenge of translating the inimitable

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## Abstract

The main question raised in this paper is: Is it possible to translate the ‘genre’ of Quran? And if this ‘genre’ is Quran specific, a ‘genre’ of its own, i.e. a unique one, how can the Quranic text be translated from Arabic into English or any other language? This question has been raising a lot of controversy among translation theorists, linguists, philosophers and scholars of Islam and specialists in the sciences of Arabic language let alone Quran exegetes. Scholars of the Arabic language and scholars of Islam have argued that because of the genre of Quran is the genre of (ijaz), translatability can never be possible. Equivalence, thus, cannot be achieved especially if we know that so far there has been no unanimous definition of the term.

Therefore, what translators of the Quranic text are involved with is transferring meaning of the Quranic text. But meaning (content) is encapsulated in the Form which is distinctly and uniquely rhetorical in Quran. In other words, such an inextricable content-form relationship should make the process of transferring meaning not an easy one at all, especially as we know that the Quranic text is sacred and sensitive.

Thus, the periphrastic way which has already been put forward by Raof (2001: 6) can be seen as a convenient solution to achieve a degree of approximation between the source text and the target text.

Having supported the notion of approximation, I opted to choose certain verses with certain syntactic and lexical aspects from the Quran. The point is to compare three versions of translations of each verse to see which version is most approximate to the Quranic text of the verse. The three versions are by Abdullah Yusuf Ali (non Arab Moslem), Marmaduke Pickthall ( a British national who converted to Islam) and Ahl-lul-Bait institution ( a Moslem Assembly with Arabic as mother tongue).

To support my argument, I relied on Al-Mezan Fi-Tafseer Al-Quran (Al-Mezan Exegesis) by the Moslem scholar Mohammed Hussein Tabatabae (2006) and the authentic monolingual Arabic Dictionary Lisan Al-Arab (Ibn Manzur: 2005 ed.4). One main conclusion made in this paper is that the task of translating the meaning of Quran cannot be rightfully carried out by translators on individual basis. Rather, it must be institutionalized. There is a need for setting up a special institution entrusted with such a meticulous job.

## Introduction

The first translation of the Quranic text is thought to be by Salman Al-Farisi (Also known as Salman Al- Muhammedi) who translated the opening Aya (Al-Fatiha) into Persian in the 7th century. (www.wikipedea.com)

The first German translation dates back to 1772. There is also some reference to some translation into Chinese.

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The translation into Latin was carried out by Robert of Ketton in 1143 (he was the first to translate the Quranic text into a western language). The first translation into English was done by Alexander Ross in 1649. Other translations appeared in 1734, 1937, 1955. More translations of the Quranic text have appeared and are still appearing.

Numerous are the translations of the Quranic text into English by Moslems and non-Moslems. The most popular among the Moslem translators are Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Mohammed Mohsin Khan M.H. Shakir and Marmaduke Pickthall (a convert into Islam). And many are the translations into so many languages. The year 1936 only saw the translations into (102) languages (ibid.)

But the big number of translations by Moslem and non-Moslem translators do not mean that such translations of such a unique religious text demanded no-problematic process. Nor all these translations are equally adequate. On the contrary, it can be said that not few are the translations which fell short of the requirements of translating the heavenly text of the Quran. It also can be argued that most of the inadequacies of the translations of the Quranic text can most probably be attributed to the fact that the translators seem to have failed to take up the big challenge of approaching such an inimitable, matchless text. They must have failed to realize the content-form balance in their translations. This is mainly because the Quran has a unique genre of its own.

Translating the Quranic text has always been a highly problematic job for translators no matter how efficient and skillful they might be. But this does not mean that the number of translations of the Quranic text is limited. Quoting the World Bibliography of the Meanings of the Holy Quran (1986), Catherine Moir says there are 2668 printed translations of the Book of Quran into 70 different languages, 300 different ones into Urdu alone. (2009: 36). For her, this is the great paradox of the “untranslatable” religious texts such as the Quran.

## **But what is meant by ‘genre’?**

“In Discourse Analysis genre is a particular class of speech events which are considered by the speech community as being of the same type. Examples are of prayers, sermons, songs, speeches, poems, poetry, prose, letters and novels. They have particular and distinctive characteristics” (Jack and others 1992: 165).

“A genre is a patterning of communication created by a combination of the individual (cognitive), social, and technical forces implicit in a recurrent communicative situation. A genre structures communication by creating shared expectations about the form and content of the interaction, thus easing the burden of production and interpretation.” This refers to: “1. the communicative goals it supports; its conventions (of both form and content); the underlying situation (in both its technical and social guises) in which the genre is employed; the relationship between the underlying situation and the genre’s conventions and the discourse community of those who enact the genre”. (http://edutechwiki.unige.ch/en/Genre_theory)

## **The Genre of the Quran: The genre of (ijaz):**

The Quran has its own independent genre . And such uniqueness can never be imitated. According to Al-Baqillani , a moslem theologian and scholar (950-1013) “No human literary criteria could be used or applied to evaluate it… it is the nature of the speaker himself, God, that makes it impossible to speak of any kind of similarity or comparability between the Quran and any other text” (as cited in Abu-Zayd 2003: 3)

“The notion of the supremacy of the Quran, that constitutes its inimitability (ijaz), was developed later and in terms of its rhetorical characteristics” ( ibid.:2).

Rhetorical features, which can explicitly and abundantly be found in the Quran add to the spiritual beauty of the Quranic text. In the meanwhile, “it makes stringent demands on the translator” (Hatim 1997: 112)

In her article “Translation and the Conflicting Semantic Systems” Dr. Al-Khamlishee commented on the (ijaz) of the Quran: “The phenomenon of (ijaz) of the Quran and its eloquence helped develop the science of Arabic Rhetoric in the 9th century.” (2006-2007: 1). And different forms of metaphoric expressions were discovered and analyzed by writers like Al-Baqillani, Al-Jurjani and Abdul Aziz Al-Salami. Dr. Al-Khamlishee went further when she quoted Louis Massignon as saying that the Quranic text played a pivotal role in the forming of the standard Arabic (ibid.5).This is how, she argued, the rhetoric in other languages remains limited in comparison with the Arabic language. And, therefore, translators of most of the translations into such languages including the English language are limited as they have been trying to just convey the meaning of the message of the Source text (SL), but not as encapsulated within its rhetorical style forgetting that Form and Content in the Quranic text are inextricable.

Quoting Ibn-Qutaibah , a Moslim writer in Theology, Philosophy and Literary criticism (828-889), Al-Khamlishee highlighted the richness of the metaphoric expressions in the Arabic language: it has metaphors, shifts, foregrounding, metonymy, simile, repetition, ellipsis, al-saj’, pun…etc.

Therefore, Al-Kamlishee concluded, “No translator can translate the Quran into any other language as the Gospil, and other scriptures (Old Testament and Psalms).” (ibid)

This potentially rhetorical style of the Quran rendered the Arabic language not only capable of transferring meaning and thoughts of other languages but also add to the beauty of the source language text. To support her conclusion, Al-Khamlishee quoted Al-Jahiz (Moslim theologian, scholar, intellectual, and literateur known for his masterful Arabic prose 776-869) who had already had the experience of translating literary and non-literary Indian, Greek and Persian books, as saying: “Some of these texts turned to have acquired yet more beauty when translated into Arabic. My translations of other texts were fully adequate without dropping any particle”.

In fact transferring the meaning of the Quran into other languages (into English for the purpose of this research) should never be possible unless the translator comprehends the interaction between the elements of “the semiotic triad: text-discourse-genre” (Hatim 2007: 86). Hatim argues that text designs are not ends in themselves…Discourse is enabled by intermediary structure at the interface of text-discourse: ‘genre’. “This is a style of writing and speaking. As such, genre imposes its constraints on what can or cannot be said within the parameters of genre. For example in a laboratory report, the active sentence structure in English would be rhetorically salient (i.e. unordinary, unexpected) (as cited in Beaugrande: 1980) and thus worth heeding and preserving” (as cited in Beaugrande 1978). Similarly an agentless English passive would acquire particular salience in a political speech is thus certainly worth preserving, concluded Hatim. It can be assumed that both the traditional and current definition of genre may help the translator when translating the meaning of the Quran, “In traditional literary studies ‘genre’…was defined by conventions of Form and Content…the new term ‘genre’ has been able to connect a recognition of regularities in discourse types with a broader social and cultural understanding of language in use (Freedman and Meday 1994: 1)

So the act of translation when it comes to transferring meaning of Quran into other languages should never be merely communicative. If dealing with non-Quranic text could require the translator to intervene at varying degrees in one way or another particularly with political texts, such an intervention which is meant to change meaning of the Quranic message must be forbidden. Here is an area when the translator can never do any manipulating since it is a repository of linguistic, cultural, historical, stylistic, rhetorical and structural features of its own within which meaning is shrouded. A look at the translation of the following example of a Quranic text (Al-Baqarah : verse 2/ Aya 93) may tell us how translation here is not a mere act of communication:

**وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ وَرَفَعْنَا فَوْقَكُمُ الطُّورَ خُذُواْ مَا آتَيْنَاكُم بِقُوَّةٍ وَاسْمَعُواْ قَالُواْ سَمِعْنَا وَعَصَيْنَا وَأُشْرِبُواْ فِى قُلُوبِهِمُ**
**الْعِجْلَ بِكُفْرِهِمْ قُلْ بِئْسَمَا يَأْمُرُكُم بِهِ إِيمَانُكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ** {٩٣/٢} (Al-Baqarah)

93. And remember We took your covenant and We raised above you (the towering height) of Mount (Sinai): (Saying):

"Hold firmly to what We have given you, and hearken (to the Law)": They said:" We hear, and we disobey:" And they had to drink into their hearts (of the taint) of the calf because of their Faithlessness. Say: "Vile indeed are the behests of your Faith if ye have any faith!" (Yusuf Ali Translation)

.Hold fast by that which We have given you, and hear (Our Word), they said: We hear and we rebel. And (worship of) the calf was made to sink into their **hearts** because of their rejection (of the covenant). Say (unto them): Evil is that which your belief enjoineth on you, if ye are believers. (Pickthall Translation)

(93).And when We made a covenant with you and raised the mountain over you: Take hold of what We have given you with firmness and be obedient. They said: We hear and disobey. And they were made to imbibe (the love of) the calf into **their hearts** on account of their unbelief. Say: Evil is that which your belief bids you if you are believers. ( Ahl-ul-bait Translation)

The image of وَأُشْرِبُواْ فِي **قُلُوبِهِمُ** الْعِجْلَ is translated in three different ways by three translators. This is because conveying the meaning of such an image cannot be possible if it is not taken as part of the whole text within which it stands. Second, the word **قُلُوبِهِمُ** can be seen as a signifier of the signified –the ability to do the reasoning out which is the job of mind. Thus the choice of the word 'imbibe' for وَأُشْرِبُواْ is a right choice in comparison with other two choices 'sink into' and 'drink into' since 'imbibe' means 'to absorb: **to receive into the mind** (Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary 1982 : 652). The very use of 'imbibe' helped the translator in the third translation to cut on re-wording compared with other two translations to be closer to the form which is one main constraint of the source text. It can be noticed that the three translators tried to decompose the source message to recompose it across the linguistic-cultural borders after acceptability (Toury 180: 17 as cited in Venuti: 2000: 469).

Still, some translators of the meaning of the Quran may presumably aim at equivalence. But this alternative has also proved unfit for the genre of Quran since it is impossible to achieve an equivalent in the target text identical to source text in terms of both content and form. This is why shifting the emphasis by Toury away from exploring equivalence between the translation and the foreign text and focusing on the acceptability of the translation in the target culture is more logical (ibid.470).

Nida, a translator of the Bible, favored the dynamic equivalence (a translation principle according to which a translator seeks to translate the meaning of the original in such a way that the TL wording will trigger the same impact on the TC audience as the original wording did upon the ST audience (Leonardi 2000: 4). But, what can be suitable for translating the Bible should certainly not be so in translating the Quran.

Basil Hatim and Jeremy Munday (2004: 41) differentiated between the Literal translation and the Formal translation. They say that the former "tend to preserve formal features almost by default (i.e. with little or no regard for context). A formal translation is almost always contextually motivated: formal features are preserved only if they carry contextual values that become part of overall text meaning." But such equivalence can be good enough for scriptures other than the Quran since it is highly form-bound.

**The Communicative and Semantic Translation:**

Can the Semantic translation be any help for the translator of the Quranic text? The semantic translation, according to Newmark is "source language -biased, literal and faithful, whereas the communicative translation is target language-biased, free, and idiomatic (1981: 39). A translator of the Quranic text is expected to opt for the semantic translation as it seeks to stick to the style of the (ST). And he may go for the semantic and communicative translation if they together may help reproduce the thought-content (ibid.42). But the point is the fact the different languages have different semantic systems, a difference described by Al-Khamlishee as "conflicting". And given that the discourse of Quran is distinctly rhetorical, the translator should be in limbo.

The cognitive approach would neither be the right solution needed by the translator of the Quranic text. "It replaces figurative and colloquial language, idioms and phrasal verbs with denotative terms; clears up lexical and grammatical ambiguities…". It also cares very much about the structural, semantic and cultural components of the TL. But in the end the text is removed from its natural, cultural and linguistic axis to a neutral universal plane of language" (Newmark 1981:41).

One may agree with Newmark who concluded that it is the nature of the material (text) which dictates its conditions. Stuffs like non literary writings, informative articles and books, reports, scientific and technological writings, propaganda, publicity; public notes…are suitable for communicative translation. But this method, argued Newmark, would not work with texts where the writer/speaker is as important as the content in them like religious, political, philosophical or literary. They need to be translated semantically (Ibid. 44).

But the figurative language expected generally in serious works of art, contended Newmark, becomes meaningful only when it is recreated in the metaphor of the TL and its culture or when this is not possible, reduced to its sense (ibid. 45). This sense-for-sense approach may still not be workable when it comes to texts where the medium (i.e. form) is as important as the message and the two cultures may not say the same things. (ibid. 64).

A reference to the sense-for-sense approach was also made by Basil Hatim and Jeremy Munday. This reference was to St. Jerome's description of his bible translation strategies, "I render not word-for-word but sense-for-sense" (as cited in Jerome 395/ 1997: 25). This approach was seen by Hatim and Munday (2004: 11) as "…of particular importance for the translation of such sensitive texts as the Bible." It should be assumed that this approach would not work with translating the Quranic text though it is also a sensitive one.

What is the alternative, then? Can any equivalence be produced in translating the Quranic text?

Having realized that the Quran has its own idiosyncrasies at the lexical, syntactic and semantic levels let alone the rhetoric and eloquence which are no match to any other language, it can very well be expected that an equivalent in the TL would be rather impossible to achieve. Such impossibility is described by Raof as a mirage (2001: 5). He attributed the phenomenon of untranslatability of the Quranic text to the semantic void (as cited in Dagut: 1978) such as cultural, lexical, and syntactic elements which are unique examples of non-equivalence among languages. Raof, therefore, came to the conclusion that "such voids can be tackled by periphrastic way. i.e. via the use of re-wording" (2001: 10).

In his paper, The Loss in the Translation of Quran Abdlwali came to the same conclusion, "This lexical compression of Quranic expressions can only be tackled through componential analysis: the translator's nightmare can be alleviated by the semantic decomposition of the words. The Quranic lexical and morphological core senses are impenetrable. Thus a periphrastic translation approach is advisable". (2007: 4)

**Lexical and syntactic analysis of translations of Quranic texts:**

Acceptability, translatability, and equivalence are what the translator may seek to achieve when translating the Quranic text into a target language. By comparing three versions of translations of the same Aya (chosen by the writer of this paper) analytical points have been made, also by the writer of this paper. This is to try to put to test the views, conclusions, opinions and suggestions put forward by linguists, translation theorists, translators and writers as reviewed earlier. The first and second versions were done by two Moslem translators, both are non-Arab: the first is Abdullah Yusuf Ali and the second is a convert into Islam (Marmaduke Pickthall). The third version was done by the institution (Ahl-lul-bait), which is based on Al-Mezan Fi Tafseer Al-Quran (Al-Mezan Exegesis). This Exegesis can be described as objective as it refers to other interpretations made by schools of Quranic Exegesis and other Quran Exegetes. What is specifically interesting and thus helpful is that Al-Meezan interprets verses of Quran with the help of other related verses in the Quran. In other words it interprets Quran via Quran. The translators of the third version are Arab scholars whose mother tongue is Arabic. Not only this, linguists and specialized in fields required must have been consulted as is the case with an effort done by an institution not by individual persons.

**Example One:**

ذَلِكَ وَمَن يُعَظِّمْ شَعَائِرَ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّهَا مِن تَقْوَى الْقُلُوبِ {٣٢/٢٢}
(سورة الحج)

Such (is the Pilgrimage): whoever honors the sacred rites of Allah, for him it is good in the Sight of his Lord (Yusuf Ali Translation) - http://www.harunyahya.com/Quran_translation/Quran_translation22.php

That (is the command). And whoso magnifieth the offerings consecrated to Allah, it surely is from devotion of the **hearts** ( Pickthall Translation )- http://www.islam101.com/quran/QTP/QTP022.htm

That (shall be so); and whoever respects the **signs** of Allah, this surely is (the outcome) of the piety of hearts. (Ahl-ul-Bait translation - http://www.ahl-ul-bait.org/quran-final1/indexe).

It can be noticed that the translators of the three versions of translation must have tried hard to convey the message into the target language as closely as possible to that of the source text. The three translators seem to have decomposed the ST message so that they can recompose it in the TT. Unfortunately the first two versions failed to observe both the semantic and syntactic demands: the third, however, looks to have produced the nearest possible version. This is because it expectantly relied on the exegesis of the Quran (Tafseer Al-Mizan) and on resources such as the authentic monolingual Dictionary of Arabic Lisan Al-Arab. (Ibn Manzur: 2007)

**Table One**

| Source Language | Target Language (Version 1) Yusuf Ali's | Target Language (Version 2) Pickthalll's | Target Language (Version 3) Ahl-lul-Bait's |
|---|---|---|---|
| يُعَظِّمْ | Honors | Magnifieth | respects |
| شَعَائِرَ | sacred rites | offerings | signs |
| الْقُلُوبِ | good in the Sight of his Lord | Hearts | Hearts |
| تَقْوَى | (merged with hearts) | Devotion | Piety |

The key word in this verse is **شعائر** which affects the co-text in the translated version. Both Ali and Pickthall seem to have understood the meaning of the word **شعائر** as part of those **شعائر** usually observed and done by Moslems in pilgrimage – to consecrate offerings at certain points. This is why Ali's option for **يعظم** was 'honors' and 'sacred righrs' for **شعائر** . And Pickthall's choice was magnifieth for **يعظم** and offerings for **شعائر** . As for the word **تقوى** it is merged with the word **قلوب** ( good in the sight of his Lord) in Ali's version.

Lisan Al-Arab Dictionary defines the word **شعيره** as:

والشَّعِيرة: البدنة المُهْداةُ، سميت بذلك"
لأنه يؤثر فيها بالعلامات، والجمع شعائر. **وشِعارُ الحج: مناسكه وعلاماته**
**وآثاره وأعماله، جمع شَعيرَة، وكل ما جعل عَلَماً لطاعة الله عز وجل**
**كالوقوف والطواف والسعي والرمي والذبح وغير ذلك؛ ومنه الحديث: أن جبريل**
**أتى النبي، صلى الله عليه وسلم، فقال: مر أُمتك أن يرفعوا أصواتهم**
**بالتلبية فإِنها من شعائر الحج.**
**والشَّعِيرَةُ والشِّعارَةُ**
(* قوله: «والشعارة» كذا بالأصل مضبوطاً
بكسر الشين وبه صرح في المصباح، وضبط في القاموس بفتحها). والمَشْعَرُ:
كالشِّعارِ. وقال اللحياني: شعائر الحج مناسكه، واحدتها شعيرة. وقوله تعالى:
فاذكروا الله عند المَشْعَرِ الحرام؛ هو مُزْدَلِفَةُ، وهي جمعٌ تسمى
بهما جميعاً. والمَشْعَرُ: المَعْلَمُ والمُتَعَبَّدُ من مُتَعَبَّداتِهِ.
والمَشاعِرُ: المعالم التي ندب الله إِليها وأَمر بالقيام عليها؛ ومنه سمي
المَشْعَرُ الحرام لأَنه مَعْلَمٌ للعبادة وموضع؛ قال: ويقولون هو
المَشْعَرُ الحرام والمِشْعَرُ، ولا يكادون يقولونه بغير الأَلف واللام. وفي
**التنزيل: يا أَيها الذين آمنوا لا تُحِلُّوا شَعائرَ الله؛ قال الفرّاء:**
**كانت العرب عامة لا يرون الصفا والمروة من الشعائر ولا يطوفون بينهما**
**فأَنزل الله تعالى: لا تحلوا شعائر الله؛ أَي لا تستحلوا ترك ذلك؛ وقيل:**
**شعائر الله مناسك الحج. وقال الزجاج في شعائر الله: يعنى بها جميع متعبدات**
**الله التى أَشْعرها الله أَي جعلها أَعلاماً لنا، وهى كل ما كان من موقف**
**أَو مسعى أَو ذبح، وإِنما قيل شعائر لكل علم مما تعبد به لأَن قولهم**
**شَعَرْتُ به علمته، فلهذا سميت الأَعلام التى هى متعبدات الله تعالى شعائر.** (2005: 91).

So one can agree with the choice made by the translator of the third version which is **sign** for **شعائر**

Naturally his choice should govern the co-text of the translation of this verse in the target language- **respects** for **يعظم,** signs for **شعائر,** and piety for **تقوى** .

The choice of Signs for شعائر is supported by Al-Mizan Fi Tafseer Al-Quran (2006: 304)

" والشعائرجمع شعيره وهي العلامه ، وشعائر الله الأعلام التي نصبها الله تعالى لطاعته كما قال ( ان الصفا "
والمروة من شعائر الله) وقال: (و البدن جعلناها لكم من شعائر الله)"

So in God's words the "**البدن** " is just part of the **شعائر** that is translated by Ali as "sacred rites" and by Pickthall as "offerings".

In the three translations of the following verse it can be noticed that the word "قلوب is rendered as equally the same (hearts) since it symbiotically is the signifier of a number of 'signifieds'. But it can very well be said that it is not the translation of a sing lexical item on its own in this verse that may help convey the meaning of the whole verse. Rather it is the observance of the idiosyncrasies of the genre of the Quran which is by itself Quranic specific- the content-form combination where we have the meaning is intricately encapsulated by the form.

**ExampleTwo:**

أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَتَكُونَ لَهُمْ **قُلُوبٌ يَعْقِلُونَ بِهَا** أَوْ آذَانٌ يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا
فَإِنَّهَا لَا تَعْمَى الْأَبْصَارُ وَلَكِن تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبُ الَّتِي فِي الصُّدُورِ {٤٦/٢٢} (سورة الحج)

**46.** Do they not travel through the land, so that **their hearts (and minds)** may thus learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly it is not their eyes that are blind, but their **hearts** which are in their breasts. (Yusuf Ali translation)

022.046 Have they not travelled in the land, and have they **hearts** wherewith to feel and ears wherewith to hear? For indeed it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the **hearts**, which are within the bosoms, that grow blind. (Pickthall translation)

(46).Have they not traveled in the land so that they should have **hearts** with which to understand, or ears with which to hear? For surely it is not the eyes that are blind, but blind are the **hearts** which are in the breasts. (Ahl-ul-Bait translation).

**Table Two**

| **Source Text** | **Ali's Translation** | **Pickthall's Translation** | **Ahl-lul-Bait's Translaion** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ | Do they not travel through the land? | Have they not travelled in the land? | Have they not travelled in the land? |
| 2. فَتَكُونَ لَهُمْ **قُلُوبٌ يَعْقِلُونَ بِهَا** | So their hearts (and minds) | And have they hearts wherewith to feel | So that they should have hearts with which to understand |
| 3. أَوْ آذَانٌ يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا | and their ears may thus learn to hear? | and ears wherewith to hear? | Or ears with which to hear |
| 4. فَإِنَّهَا لَا تَعْمَى الْأَبْصَارُ | Truly it is not their eyes that are blind | For indeed it is not the eyes that grow blind | For surly it is not the eyes that are blind |
| 5. وَلَكِن تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبُ الَّتِي فِي الصُّدُورِ | But their hearts which are in their breast | But it is the hearts which are within bosoms that grow blind | But blind are the hearts which are in the breasts |

In segment (1) Ali changed the tense from the present perfect (the action of travelling has been completed with the result of which is still felt) into the present in 'Do they not travel'.

In segment (2) Ali changed the verb 'يعقلون 'into noun 'mind' at a time when the reasoning takes place in the heart itself. This is quite supportive by Lisan Al-Arab

**وقوله تعالى: نَزَلَ به الرُّوحُ الأَمِينُ على قَلْبك؛ قال الزجاج: معناه نَزَلَ به جبريلُ، عليه السلام، عليك، فوَعاه " قَلْبُك، وثَبَتَ فلا تَنْساه أبداً. وقد يعبر بالقَلْبِ عن العَقْل، قال الفراءُ في قوله تعالى: إن في ذلك لَذِكْرى لمن كان له قَلْبٌ؛ أي عَقْلٌ. قال الفراءُ: وجائزٌ في العربية أن تقولَ: ما لَكَ قَلْبٌ، وما قَلْبُك معك؛ تقول: ما عَقْلُكَ معكَ، وأين ذَهَبَ قَلْبُك؟ أي أين ذهب عَقْلُكَ؟ وقال غيره: لمن كان له قَلْبٌ أي تَفَهُّمٌ وتَدَبُّرٌ. " (٢٠٠٥:١٦٩**

**حث وتحضيض على الأعتبار بهذه القرى الهالكه ولآثار المعطله والقصور المشيده التي تركتها تلك الأمم " البائده بالسير في الأرض فأن السير فيها ربما بعث الأنسان الى ان يتفكر في نفسه في سبب هلاكهم ويستحضر الحجج في ذلك فيتذكر ان الذي وقع بهم انما وقع لشركهم بالله واعراضهم عن اياته واستكبارهم على الحق بتكذيب الرسل فيكون له قلب يعقل به ويردعه عن الشرك والكفر." (٢٠٠٦:٣١٧)**

Thus, the act of understanding takes place in the hearts as the third version rendered it. Also this 'understanding' came as a result of travelling in the land. So the modal verb 'Should' is quite necessary since the degree of certainty for the understanding to happen must be high according to the structure of the text. Pickthall's choice of 'feel' for **يعقلون** is not accurate either.

In segment (5) the word-order maintained in the third version is where the translator observed both the content and form since the purpose of word order here is emphasis. (but blind are the hearts which are in the breasts)

Ahl-lul-Bait's translation of the following Quranic verse presents another evidence that the message of such a verse can be translated but not at the expense of accuracy. And again to accurately convey such a message both the referential and contextual meaning of the components of a certain verse is of utmost importance. Let's have a look at the translations of the following verse:

**Example Three:**

لِيَجْعَلَ مَا يُلْقِي الشَّيْطَانُ فِتْنَةً **لِّلَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ وَالْقَاسِيَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ** وَإِنَّ الظَّالِمِينَ لَفِي شِقَاقٍ بَعِيدٍ {٥٣/٢٢} ( سورة الحج)

6. **53.** That He may make the suggestions thrown in by Satan, but a trial for those in whose **hearts** is a disease and who are hardened of heart the (Yusuf Ali translation)

022.053 That He may make that which the devil proposeth a temptation for those in whose hearts is a disease, and those whose hearts are hardened (Pickthall translation)

53).So that He may make what the Shaitan casts a trial for those in whose **hearts** is disease and those whose **hearts** are hard. (Ahl-ul-Bait translation)

**Table three**

| **Source Text** | **Ali's Translation** | **Pickthall 'sTranslation** | **Ahl-lul-Bait's Translation** |
|---|---|---|---|
| A. لِيَجْعَلَ مَا يُلْقِي الشَّيْطَانُ فِتْنَةً | That he may make the suggestions thrown in by Satan | That he may make that which the devil proposeth a temptation | So that he may make what the Shaitan casts a trial |
| B. **لِّلَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ** | But a trial for those in whose hearts is a disease and who are hardened of heart | For those in whose hearts is a disease and those whose hearts are hardened | For those in whose hearts is disease and those whose hearts are hard |

What can be noticed in (A) is the lexical variation for the word شيطان (Satan. Devil, Satan) in the three translations. In English The Devil and Satan are the same (the supreme spirit of evil: The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English).

In Lisan-Al- Arab ‘الشيطان‘ : ‘ من شاط يشيط. وفي الحديث : اعوذ بك من شر الشيطان وفتونه “ حباله التي يصيد بها وشياطه وشجونه ، قيل : الصواب واشطانه (2005: 176). So in the context of the religion of Islam الشيطان not any devil or any Satan which is symbolic of evil spirit. Rather it is Iblees, the-used-to-be angel who disobeyed the command of Allah.

Also at the lexical semantic level is the choice made by Ali for ‘thrown ‘as an equivalent for ‘ يلقي‘ . He should have chosen ‘cast’ as the translator did in the third translation. This is because synonymous words like ‘cast’ and ‘throw’ are the same but not exactly the same. The two synonymous words must not be used interchangeably at least in such a sensitive text.

It can be assumed that in their efforts to convey the message from the SL into the TL the translators of the first and second versions seem to have strived to move within the already restricted room dictated by the form of the Quran structure. Sometimes they sounded too wordy which affected the degree of accuracy in the process of transferring meaning especially when they used synonymous words interchangeably or failed to observe some essential formal aspects like word order for the purpose of emphasis. This can clearly be seen in Table Two (5) where the emphatic point in the segment: “ but blind are the hearts which are in the breasts” in the third version was rendered equally emphatic by observing the word-order. In the first and second versions the point of emphasis was missed by shifting “blind” at the back.

Compared with translators of the first and second versions the translators of the third version seem to have produced the most approximate version to the TL. This could very well be attributed to the fact that this version is the product of not an individual translator on his own. Rather, it is the product of group work adopted by an institution (Ahl-lul-Bait) entrusted with a mission peculiar to dealing with the sensitive text of Quran.

## Conclusions:

The question of translating the Quranic text is of utmost importance. This is because millions of non-Arab people over the world need to understand the Quran. But the increasing need to a translated version of the Quranic text should not lead to inaccuracy in transferring meaning. In the meanwhile translating the inimitable text of Quran which has its own specific genre should be a team work not individual work. And this team work should be subject to examining and cross-examining at a panel level which is entrusted with securing all the necessary expertise of highly specialized scholars in linguistics, sciences of the Arabic Language, history, exegeses in addition to any other speciality. It is, therefore, necessary to recommend the setting up of an institution at the Arab countries level or the Islamic World level to be entrusted with such a virtually impossible work. A unified version of Quran in English and in any other language may be produced by a prospective institution, which can be liable to updating or amended if necessary. Such an authentic central body would be in charge of the job of translating and cross-checking through a network of relationships with any reliable authority all over the world. And no translation of the Quranic text anywhere in the world could be authentic unless approved by the central body. This would put an end to the ad hoc translation work of Quranic text appearing now then and here and there.

Of course the suggestion of organizing the translational effort of the Quranic text within an institution does not mean that such an institution is a place where an identical equivalent can be produced since such an achievement is certainly impossible. Rather it is an institution where the most approximate version can be produced with the highest degree of accuracy and exactness, especially as the number of articles and papers criticizing some translated versions of Quranic text by individuals is on the increase.

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# ترجمة معاني القرآن الكريم: التحدي في ترجمة الاعجاز

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## المستخلص

ان السؤال الرئيس في هذا البحث هو: هل من الممكن ترجمة النص القرآني من حيث الشكل والمضمون؟ واذا كان هذا النص له خصائصه التي لا يشركه فيها اي نص آخر في اي لغة اخرى اي نص فريد من نوعه، كيف يتسنى ترجمته الى اللغة الأنجليزيه ا و الى اية لغة اخرى ؟ وهذا السؤال اثار وما يزال يثير الكثير من الجدل بين منظري الترجمه وعلماء اللغه والمترجمين غير ان المختصين بالدين الأسلامي وعلوم اللغه العربيه كالنحو والصرف والبلاغه والبيان والبديع يرون ان استحالة ترجمة النص القرآني من حيث الشكل والمضمون معا تعود الي اسلوب القرآن الأعجازي الذي يعجز اي مترجم مهما كان متمرسا وماهرا ان يقدم نسخه مترجمه معادله له. وهنا يصبح ايجاد المعادل للنص القرآني امرا يستحيل تحقيقه لا سيما اذا علمنا انه لم يتم التوصل لحد الآن الى تعريف موحد للمصطلح "معادل".

لذا فان ما يسعى اليه مترجمو النص القرآني هو نقل المعنى. الا ان هذا المعنى يبقى محكوما بالشكل الذي يحتويه و الذي له خصائصه البلاغيه المتفرده وبعباره اخرى ان العلاقه بين الشكل والمضمون في النص القرآني هي علاقه متلازمه لا يمكن فصل بعضهما عن البعض الاخر بشكل واضح ومتميز مما يجعل نقل المعنى عملية غير سهله على الأطلاق غير ان هذه الصعوبه واستحالة ايجاد معادل للنص القرآني من حيث الشكل والمضمون لم يؤدِّ الى التقاعس عن بذل المزيد من الجهد بغية انجاز افضل ترجمة لمعاني النص القرآني. وهذا ما اشارت اليه الباحثه كاثرين موير في بحثها عن ترجمة النصوص الدينيه " هذا هو التناقض الكبير حول النص الديني الذي لايمكن ترجمته مثل النص القرآني- ان ما يتعذر ترجمته هو في الواقع غالبا ما يترجم بشكل واسع". وقد دعمت استنتاجها هذا بأرقام مصدرها الببلوغرافيا العالميه لمعاني القرآن الكريم لعام ١٩٨٦ عندما كتبت ان عدد ترجمات معاني القرآن الكريم المنشوره الى عام ١٩٨٦ هي ٢٦٦٨ وبسبعين لغة مختلفه منها ثلاث مائة ترجمة باللغه الأرديه فقط. (٢٠٠٩: ٣٦ ).

ومن اجل اعطاء فكره عن مدى صعوبة ترجمة معاني القرآن الكريم واهمية الدقه في نقل المعنى دون اضافة ا و نقصان عمدت الى اختيار نصوص معينه من القرآن الكريم تقابل كل نص منها ثلاث ترجمات اخترتها انا ايضا من اجل الوقوف على مدى نجاح كل مترجم من الترجمات الثلاث في تحقيق اكبر درجه من التقارب في المعنى بين النص القرآني وترجمته باللغه الأنجليزيه. وتاتي هذه المقارنه انسجاما مع نظرية التقارب التي جابها الدكتور حسين عبد الله رؤوف (٢٠٠١: ١٠).

واهم ما خلص اليه البحث هو ضرورة انشاء موسسه على مستوى العالم العربي ا و العالم الأسلامي تناط بها مهمة ترجمة معاني القرآن الكريم ونشر ما يصدر عنها من ترجمات وينبغي ان لا يسمح لاية ترجمه تصدر في اي مكان في العالم بالنشر مالم تصادق عليها هذه المؤسسه وذلك للحد من القصور الذي تتسم به ترجمات صدرت وما تزال تصدر.